



April 24, 2020

The Honorable Tony Evers
Governor
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

RE: Coronavirus Relief Fund Allocation

Dear Governor Evers:

The Wisconsin Assisted Living Association (WALA) represents the majority of Wisconsin's assisted living providers, with over 1,500 assisted living facility members. This includes community-based residential facilities (CBRF), residential care apartment complexes (RCAC), and adult family homes (AFH). Our facilities serve over 20,000 residents and employ tens of thousands of employees.

Thank you for your support and leadership during this unprecedented public health crisis. Our members are very appreciative of everything you are doing for the state of Wisconsin. In addition, we appreciate a number of the flexibilities provided by 2019 Act 185.

Unfortunately, our members are still in dire need of financial assistance. In an effort to protect the population most vulnerable to COVID-19 - Wisconsin's elderly and individuals with disabilities, our providers and their staff are working tirelessly, in many cases without adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), to keep staff and residents safe. The lack of testing kits has made it more difficult to determine and quarantine those who are infected. In addition, the caregiver workforce shortage has intensified during this public health crisis.

As you determine how to manage and allocate the federal funding that is coming from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund, we respectfully request your consideration that financial assistance is provided to assisted living facilities to help them with significant increased labor costs (often being described as hazard pay), COVID-19 testing, and personal protective equipment (PPE). These are the biggest challenges facing assisted living facilities at this very moment.

Hazard Pay

On average, our members that provide services to the frail elderly population typically pay caregivers approximately \$12 - \$14/hour whereas those that serve individuals with cognitive/behavioral disabilities pay approximately \$9.50 - \$12/hour (these providers are nearly 100% reliant on the Family Care program).

WALA - Wisconsin Assisted Living Association

P.O. Box 7730 - Madison, WI 53707-7730 • Phone: 608/288-0246 • Fax: 608/288-0734 • info@ewala.org • www.ewala.org



STATE PARTNER



Assisted living providers have reported they cannot compete with the recent increased Unemployment Benefits provided in the federal CARES Act which includes an additional \$600 per week (or \$15/hour for an individual working 40 hours per week) for up to four (4) months beyond the state's unemployment benefit. While we understand the intent of providing increased unemployment benefits, this has also provided a significant disincentive for unemployed workers to seek out many of the job openings at an assisted living facility.

Therefore, during this COVID-19 public health crisis, assisted living facilities are forced to pay more overtime wages and provide "hazard pay" in an effort to recruit and retain caregivers. Our membership reported that it is currently paying higher hourly wages than what they were previously paying prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, if an assisted living facility has a resident that tested positive for COVID-19, the reported wages are even higher.

Assisted living facilities desperately need funding from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to help offset these increased staffing costs. This financial assistance needs to be directly provided to the assisted living facilities, not through the Managed Care Organizations.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Testing

As mentioned above, assisted living facilities are caring for individuals that are most vulnerable to COVID-19 yet are on the bottom of the receiving end of PPE and COVID-19 testing. We need these resources now to help protect our residents and staff.

We thank you for your consideration and if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at mpochowski@ewala.org or (414) 803-7415.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Pochowski

Michael S. Pochowski
CEO

CC: Andrea Palm, Department of Health Services Secretary-Designee